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Before the Appropriations Committee

***In Support of* HR 11 and SR 12: RESOLUTION PROPOSING APPROVAL OF AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT AND THE STATE EMPLOYEES BARGAINING AGENT COALITION (SEBAC)**

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee, my name is Tera Esposito and I am a newly hired Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA) with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. The services we provide through the state infrastructure is more comprehensive than any other.

As a COTA we help improve the functioning capabilities of the patient, which affects their quality of their life. These are patients that are dealing with long term chronic mental health issues within the inpatient units at CVH. These individuals who cannot survive on their own rely on COTA's to provide these skills to help them cope, organize themselves, develop independent living skills, sensorimotor skills and psychosocial skills.

I have the flexibility to run groups and I work with patients one on one if they are not feeling well enough to attend groups. Within DMHAS, the continuity of care, especially with psych patients, is critical so we can build rapport which yields better participation in treatment and shorter hospitalizations.

Here at DMHAS patients need time with therapy staff, and we're able to build rapport with each patient before they consistently participate in groups. We are able to conduct one on one's with patients to form a therapeutic relationship. We get the time we need to go through the patient history to understand their individual trauma and diagnosis. Effective COTA work requires constant collaboration and communication with the treatment team, which is not possible in the private sector.

Connecticut Valley Hospital used to have 19 occupational therapists – that has decreased to 7 today. This contract will allow us to recruit and retain more staff so we can restore and expand services and provide the care that our patients and Connecticut's residents deserve.

Thank you for your time.